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Amembassy GUATEMALA

DATE: August 8, 1977

SUBJECT :

Monthly Report on Political Violence and Human Rights: June 1977

REF :

SUMMARY: There were only 18 press-reported incidents of probable political violence in June. Thirteen killings resulted. It was the eighth consecutive month in which the total number of such incidents remained below 30. With the exception of several clashes between it and army patrols, none of the incidents is firmly attributable to the EGP. Two much-publicized thwarted kidnappings -- resulting in three deaths -- may not have been politically inspired. Statistics notwithstanding, these events and the assassination of a prominent labor lawyer stoked public perceptions of heightened political violence. The month also saw the appearance -- on paper at least -- of two more terrorist organizations -- GALGAS (aimed at Salvadoran immigrants) and ESA (Anti-Communist Secret Army). The Belize crisis inspired ominous GOG rhetoric in the human rights area, but no substance. END SUMMARY

EGP Relatively Quiescent The Revolutionary Army of the Poor took credit for few actions. An EGP bulletin issued in July boasted that the Edgar Ebarra Front maintained control of a campesino community in Los Angeles, in the Ixcán zone, Huehuetenango Department, for some of the month of June, and used part of the time for indoctrination efforts. On June 18 the EGP ambushed a ranger patrol on the banks of the Pescado River in the same area. It purported one soldier killed, 3 to 18 wounded.

Later in the month the EGP wounded two soldiers in a clash near Buenos Aires, on the El Quiché end of the remote Ixcán region. The EGP has been active there for some time. The burning June 25

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of buildings on a farm near Puerto Barrios owned by a member of the prominent Lowenthal family supposedly was the work of "subversives," but neither the EGR nor any other group has claimed credit.

Prominent Labor Lawyer Few political assassinations in recent times have been more widely deplored than the June 8 shooting of respected labor lawyer, university professor Mario LOPEZ LARRAVE (Guatemala 3662). The killing set off a wave of protest in labor and student circles. The EGR blamed the National Liberation Front (MLN), assisted by the major businessmen's organization CACIF, and vowed to avenge Lopez Larrave. Both entities insisted their hands were clean. Retaliation or not, the MLN mayor of San Andres Villa Seca, Peten Department, was gunned down on June 13; and shots were fired at MLN headquarters in Guatemala City (no injuries) June 17.

Suchitepéquez Campesinos Five campesinos were taken from their dwellings near Mazatenango June 28 by khaki-clad men who drove off in two cars and a jeep. Bodies found later showed signs of torture.

Journalists Intimidated Television and newspaper (La Hora) figure Jorge PALMIERI was the object of two incidents: shots were fired at his home from a passing car; and later in the month a bomb exploded at his doorstep. Leftist newspaperwoman Ana Maria RODAS of La Tarde reported her automobile vandalized and a note left behind threatening her life.

Fischer and Widmann Sons of wealthy Guatemalan families -- Roberto Fischer and Carlos Widmann -- were targets of kidnap attempts (Guatemala 3667). Fischer suffered fatal wounds while resisting. Although one of the kidnappers was a former FAR member, it now appears that motivation was simple extortion. Nothing yet has surfaced to confirm a political motive for the would-be kidnappers of Widmann, who escaped while killing one of his assailants.

Salvadorans... Newspapers June 1 carried a bulletin attributed to the Anti-Salvadoran Guatemalan Liberating Action Guerrilla Movement (GALGAS). The entity, whose bulletins represent the only evidence of its existence, recalled that GALGAS was formed November 1976 for the purpose of ridding Guatemala of Salvadorans of "all social classes," by violence if necessary. The authors of the document took credit for

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two earlier killings in Guatemala City. (Substantiated Salvadoran immigration, mostly illegal and particularly in the southern lowlands, has caused some apprehension and resentment in Guatemala.)

...and Communists The Anti-Communist Secret Army (ESA) announced its birth with press circulars on June 27. It promised to locate "communists" and execute them, since the Laugerud administration had abdicated its responsibility to defend "private property and respectable people." (The dead body of a student found early in August had with it a paper representing the killing as the work of ESA.)

Belize Dispute and Human Rights Taken literally, the Government's remarkable June 12 communique (Guatemala 3723) denouncing an alleged but never-documented UK-Belizean-Cuban-Panamanian conspiracy to undermine Guatemalan life had serious implications for the human rights climate. It charged that internal disruptions (e.g., agitation, strikes, vandalism, kidnappings) formed part of a subversive plan, hence were treasonous and punishable by death. In fact, the period was one of relative internal calm. We are unaware of any prosecutions for treason, current or pending.

Statistics Statistically, June was a slow month for political violence in Guatemala. Sifting the political violence from violence of other inspiration is a tenuous business in this violence-prone society, but by the measure of the 18 press-reported incidents (resulting in 13 deaths), this was the most peaceful month since December 1976. It represents the eighth consecutive month of fewer than 30 reported incidents. Half occurred in Guatemala Department, the Departments of Huehuetenango, El Quiché, Quezaltenango, San Marcos, Suchitepéquez, Retalhuleu, El Progreso, Chiquimula and Izabal accounted for one each.

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